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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

1 June 1967

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Implications in the Moslem World of Forcing the Strait of Tiran

Problem: To estimate the reactions of the Arab and other major Moslem states to keeping open the Strait of Tiran by naval escort forces of the US in association with other countries.

1. The course of the present Arab-Israeli crisis has already done considerable damage to the US position in the Arab world. Most Arabs believe the US is the staunch ally of Israel and can in effect control its actions. The US cannot expect to receive sympathy if it employs force in the Strait, but it will also not get any gratitude if it fails to do so. This is so even though many of Nasser's Arab adversaries hardly welcome the kind of sweeping political and psychological victory he would enjoy if he brings off his move with impunity. Even King Hussein in Jordan and King Feisal in Saudi Arabia feel increasingly compelled to move into camp with Nasser and to reassess their ties with the US.

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2. Nasser himself, whether or not he resists the forcing of the Straits, will take advantage of the opportunities provided to discredit the US and reduce its influence and presence in the area. He may at the same time find in the US action a release from the danger of Israeli attack and a way out of his present dilemma which would leave him with most of his gains.

3. Reactions in non-Arab Moslem states would be much less intense than in the Arab Middle East. US military and intelligence facilities in non-Arab Moslem states (Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan) probably would not be significantly affected, though the Turks would be unlikely to permit their soil to be used for staging military operations against any Arab state. Over the longer term, however, if this action set in motion a permanent trend toward increased Russian and Egyptian influence in the Middle East at US expense, Iran, Pakistan, and even Turkey might feel it necessary to adjust their policies to these trends.

4. The Arabs would consider any such multilateral force, no matter how constituted, to be an instrument of US policy. The climate of popular opinion toward the US would become more hostile and emotional, and popular anti-US demonstrations would almost certainly occur, possibly including violence. The seriousness of such outbreaks would be greater if US action in the Strait involved shooting.

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5. All Arab governments would feel compelled to demonstrate solidarity by making anti-US gestures or taking more serious anti-American actions. The UAR would probably close the Suez Canal to US naval ships and at least during the height of the crisis might refuse passage to other American flag vessels, particularly oil tankers. Jordan, the only eastern Arab state receiving any significant amount of US economic aid, would feel compelled to minimize its US ties. Hussein would then become politically at the mercy of the UAR and economically dependent on the other Arab states. King Feisal would probably feel it necessary to make a public accommodation with Nasser, though he would try to avoid breaking relations with the US. The Libyan Government might feel compelled to terminate the US base at Wheelus. Throughout the area US communications facilities, air traffic rights, etc., might be withdrawn or subjected to strikes and harassments.

6. The main target of attack against the US in the Arab world would be the oil industry. Unquestionably all US oil operations would be subjected to harassments. In all Arab countries sabotage incidents would be likely against American oil facilities. Strikes of oil workers with accompanying rioting

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are likely to tie up oil production and might threaten loss of American life. IPC and ARAMCO pipelines across Syria might be cut. The effects in the Persian Gulf sheikhdoms would be less. Iran could of course increase production to offset in some measure a slowing in Arab output. There is, however, some question about Iran's willingness to do so. Algerian oil is produced mainly by French companies and would probably continue to flow.

7. Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Libya will be under very heavy pressure to retaliate against American companies, but will be concerned with the effects on their own revenues of any retaliatory measures. They might halt oil production by US firms only temporarily. Libya might attempt to institute a selective boycott against those countries which contributed ships to the effort to force the blockade. Initially, at least, outright nationalization seems unlikely even in the UAR.

8. Once the situation in the Strait of Tiran was settled in one way or another, and assuming no major hostilities in the area occurred, many of the anti-US activities would tend to slacken off. The chief producing countries are almost certainly

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hoping for some outcome which will not upset the highly profitable flow of oil. The Egyptians themselves are heavily dependent upon the West for the processing and marketing of petroleum. Even if nationalization occurred in some places, it might prove more a token than a definitive change.

9. The judgments above would not give a balanced picture unless some mention is made of the consequences of failure to end the blockade of the Tiran Straits. Unless the issue can be resolved in some manner tolerable to the Israelis, the odds are at least even that sooner or later they will feel impelled to take some form of military action. The Israeli Government is already under severe domestic attack for having failed to take prompt counteraction against Nasser's move a week ago, and Israeli military leaders are almost certainly pressing hard for a military move against Nasser. In their view, acquiescence in this kind of a victory for Nasser would spell more and more trouble for Israel as time went by, and we believe these fears are well grounded. Hence, their temptation will be great to fight back while their forces are mobilized and their supporters are rallied -- even if the costs and risks are comparatively high. They probably would not prove able to pull off the kind of smashing defeat of Egyptian

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forces they accomplished in 1956, but we believe the alternative -- of impotent acquiescence in a formidable political and psychological victory by Nasser -- would incline them to accept the risks.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:

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SHERMAN KENT
Chairman

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